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ABSTRACT

Psychologists learn early that the first place it is necessary to establish consistency of values is within the self. This foundation is a necessary condition to becoming an indispensable psychologist. Three ingredients to professional indispensability in psychology are excellence, relevance, and passion. Combine these with motive power (the drive to act in a manner consistent with internal values and standards) and one forms the indispensable psychologist. For psychologists, excellence may be defined as the possession of knowledge in combination with the well-refined abilities to apply scientifically sound theories and interventions in schools and communities as well as with students, school personnel, and parents. Life-long learning, referral skills, and teaming are all part of excellence. Relevance refers to the degree of fit between what school psychologists do well and what is needed by consumers of services. Indispensable psychologists, who strive to provide relevance and excellence, desire and need the color that passion brings to their life work. Passion is an essential ingredient to great actions, which may take many forms. Motive power is the ability to combine excellence, relevance, and passion into action. Motive power indicates the ability to move, and to act with strength and conviction based on abilities, standards, and values. (JBJ)

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Chapter Six

Excellence, Relevance, and Passion: The Motive Power for Indispensability

Ronda C. Talley

"We may affirm absolutely that nothing great in the world has been accomplished without passion" (George William Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History).*

As psychologists, we learn early that the first place it is necessary to establish consistency of values is within ourselves. The actions that emanate from us are based on these internal standards that reflect who we are from our own self-monitored perceptions. If we view ourselves as persons of *value,* we are well prepared to face a world that constantly tests our standards and challenges us to *act* in a manner that demonstrates our centrality—our connection of thought and behavior—in ways that reaffirm this self-knowledge.

For those of us who intimately connect our self-perception with our work, these daily value challenges, these repetitive calls for action, demand that, above all, we are centered persons of purpose and integrity. Within this framework, we are able to respond to work's life-flow with courage, assurance, compassion, and good judgment. Being "right" in ourselves, having our "own house in order," we have the capacity to respond to the great value of work in ways that balance and enhance our lives and enrich those with whom we share these sometimes frustrating, sometimes illuminating, moments.

I have taken the time to outline these beliefs because it is my contention that a person cannot accept the concept of indispensability in that portion of their life that deals with work until they can affirm their *personal* indispensability in life, regardless of and separate from vocation. This self-affirming, life-acknowledging foundation is essential to the indispensable individual and thus, is a *necessary* condition to becoming an indispensable psychologist. It lays the groundwork firmly, strongly, irrevocably. The indispensable psychologist is born of the indispensable individual.

With the affirming life perspective of the indispensable individual as a backdrop, in this chapter I will explore three ingredients to professional indispensability in psychology. While I will use psychology and psychologists' roles as the content focus for discussion, I believe these principles are germane for many professions. I will argue that excellence, relevance, and passion are the ingredients for indispensability. Combine these with motive power, the drive to *act* in a manner consistent with your internal values and standards, and they combust—crystallizing in the form of the "indispensable" psychologist—the professional some of us are and others of us aspire to be.

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Excellence

Excellence is the ultimate in work quality—it embodies the meaning of work for those professionals with the highest aspirations and skills to match. For psychologists, excellence may be defined as the possession of knowledge in combination with the well-refined abilities to apply scientifically sound theories and interventions in schools and communities as well as with students, school personnel, and parents. In the indispensability formula, excellence is a necessary precursor to relevance and passion.

Excellence in service provision is the hallmark of professional psychologists who work in schools and other settings. As a discipline, psychology is respected for its scientific rigor and high standards of practice. This respect is earned and deserved by the indispensable psychologist. A psychologist who provides relevant services in an excellent manner is one who will be valued by the individuals who receive those efforts. The indispensable psychologist, who by definition practices with excellence in whatever they do, changes lives. By being there, by providing what's needed with quality, psychologists offer a gift of knowledge plus ability that makes a *real* difference to the functioning of individuals and systems. While teachers are often judged by their abilities to help a student learn what the school has decided they need to know, the indispensable psychologist helps students develop in every facet of life and living, at school, at home, and in the community. The power of these potentially life-altering services can be staggering.

In order to address these critical responsibilities, psychologists in schools must continually demonstrate the ability to act with excellence. To do this, they must consider retraining and enhancing service provision through varied forms of life-long learning. The learning may take the form of securing peer or supervisor consultation, engaging in teaming with other psychologists or professionals from other disciplines, shadowing professionals with the desired skills, seeking case consultation, obtaining in-service training, attending professional meetings and conferences, working through self-study materials, taking university coursework, or trying on new technologies such as long-distance learning, just to name a few.

Excellence in service is not easy to provide. While there are indispensable psychologists, probably there is no *one* indispensable psychologist who is capable of possessing all the skills required for every situation for every student in every school. Therefore, in order to address the presenting needs, psychologists also know to refer students to others who are able to provide the required service with excellence. This adherence to the ethics of the profession is one quality of the indispensable psychologist. Excellence in service also means functioning as a team member when the facts suggest that teaming is the best strategy for that situation.

As noted previously, excellence is only one facet of the indispensability formula. Relevance in service provision, which is discussed in the next section, anchors excellence to the consumer's needs. Without that match, excellence may go unnoticed, unused, and unrewarded, even though it may be desperately needed.

Relevance

While excellence refers to the quality of our work, relevance refers to the degree of fit between what we do well and what is needed by consumers of our services. If students, teachers, administrators, parents, and other school and community personnel view our skills as applicable to low priority or marginalized needs, then our "excellence" becomes moot. Who cares if the psychologist has excellent skills if they are not applied to areas of priority concern? And from the psychologist's perspective, who would want to spend seven years in a doctoral school psychology program mastering scientific inquiry

and numerous empirically-based, rigorous interventions only to find out that the intended recipients of those services don't need or value them? Therefore, an essential component of the indispensable psychologist is relevance. Without relevance, skills are superfluous.

An example of excellence with relevance may be found in this oft-told gift giving illustration. To set the stage, think of the last time you received a gift you couldn't use. A classic story of this situation is the present of a tie given by a son or daughter to their father. The tie is a functional object, neither sought or valued by the recipient. In this particular case, the father usually feigns pleasure (no doubt for receipt of the gift and what it symbolizes) and puts it away. For some persons, the tie could be a relevant gift. However, this particular consumer does not need it, want it, or like it. Therefore, the gift is irrelevant except for the sentimental value inherent in the giving. Even if the tie were a designer label masterpiece, unless the recipient, the customer, wanted or needed it, the tie was irrelevant.

In a similar fashion, if the psychologist is trained to deliver a particular service, for example counseling of children with eating disorders and the district ("consumer") doesn't perceive the need for that service (even though it may be a legitimate need) then, from the consumer's perspective, that skill is irrelevant.

Another example is from personal experience. When I was director of a large urban school district's psychological services department, I continually tried to sell upper administration on the need for prevention services and noted the skills psychologists have in this area. I had varied success with my attempt to broaden the role of the psychologist and meet what I perceived to be a real district need. However, upper administrator did not see that need. They saw a backlog of initial assessments and reassessments for special education placement and told me in no uncertain terms where they viewed the "relevance" of school psychological services at that point in time. While I persisted in my efforts and was somewhat successful over a multi-year period, the relevance of applying the psychologists' skills to a perceived priority need took precedence over all other activities. What psychologists did was valued because they helped the district meet a legal requirement and provided (hopefully) useful information to teachers and parents. Even though the role of assessor may be conceptualized in this case as a narrow one, it had value and relevance.

Indispensable psychologists demonstrate excellence and relevance in combination. They do this by securing the best available training and supervised practice experiences in areas that correspond to consumer needs. They apply their skills in settings where needs are acknowledged and services may be tailored and evaluated, then refined and reapplied, until the concern is addressed. It is psychologists' relevance, their ability to match excellence in application to priority consumer need, that fulfills this portion of the indispensability formula.

While excellence and relevance provide two parts of the formula for indispensability, it is my belief that bringing passion to one's vocation is what sets apart the indispensable psychologist from one who just works. The dimension of passion in work and its relevance to indispensability will be explored next.

Passion

Passion is the fire that gives life color. Indispensable psychologists, who strive to provide relevance and excellence, desire and *need* the color that passion brings to their life work. Like satisfying a hunger, the indispensable psychologist is predisposed to act to fill this need. The psychologist who practices with excellence and relevance will be valued by most systems. However, it will be the indispensable psychologist, the one who embodies work with passion, who will be perceived as a leader, the one who

possesses the self-sufficience and personal integrity to address needs large and small with compassion, commitment, and skill.

As noted in the opening quote, passion is an essential ingredient to great actions, which may take many forms. We are passionate about those things we value. In relating her perspective on passion, value, and action, the philosopher Ayn Rand wrote:

> You have no choice about your capacity to feel that something is good for you or evil, but *what* you will consider good or evil, what will give you joy or pain, what you will love or hate, desire or fear, depends on your standard of value. Emotions are inherent in your nature, but their content is dictated by your mind. Your emotional capacity is an empty motor, and your values are the fuel with which your mind fills it. (1957, p. 947)

The indispensable psychologist creates a vision of psychology in schools that is imbued with passion, reflecting their values, attitudes, and life perspective. Action flows from the creation of that vision and is fired with passion—commitment, persistence, and intense labor—to evoke change in a system or individual. When times are challenging, excellence and relevance may make the psychologist feel safe, but it is passion that keeps them continuing to pursue their vision of what's right. Without the fire of passion, life's colors would be monotone, and work would become a cookie-cutter assembly line. Passion is the personality of commitment for the indispensable psychologist, an essential life element, without which any of us could replace the other.

Psychologists combine the elements of passion, excellence, and relevant to provide the foundation for indispensability. However, these are not enough. In the next section, motive power, the strength to act, is added to the formula for indispensability.

Motive Power

Motive power is the ability to combine your excellence, relevance, and passion into action. Motive power indicates the ability to move, and to act with strength and conviction based on your abilities, standards, and values. It conveys activity—forward momentum—toward a desirable, targeted goal. Where the three ingredients mentioned throughout this chapter—excellence, relevance, and passion—provide the substance, motive power provides the form that shapes the three together to create the indispensable psychologist.

Motive power leads you to your final goal. If your purpose as an indispensable psychologist is to provide services to urban children, motive power, which is the machine driving excellence, relevance, and passion, will take you there. It embodies action, volitional movement, that you have elected to take toward a consciously chosen purpose. Motive power represents your will to combine the best of what you have to offer and vigorously, passionately pursue that goal. It is by acknowledging your personal and professional value that you are able, though motive power, to overcome great obstacles to life and work. In combination with the three core ingredients of indispensability, motive power inalterably changes lives.

A simple example of motive power may be found in a popular movie about tornados, "Twister." The substance of a tornado is air and water, but what a combination! When the atmospheric conditions are conducive, these ingredients combine to create a phenomenon like no other in nature. So it is with motive power. If you have the skills, if you meet a valued need, if you provide your services with purpose and determination, if you *act* and acknowledge the power of your action, then like the "twister," your

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contribution becomes more than any one of the ingredients of which it is comprised. Without motive power, the separate parts remain just what they are individually. Air and water are essential life elements. Excellence, relevance, and passion are necessary to most of our professional lives. But who among us would want to be deprived of their synergistic, and in this case positive, impact? The indispensable psychologist uses motive power to coalesce these discrete but overlapping qualities into a more meaningful whole—one that is dedicated to serving children and youth in whatever settings they may be found.

Conclusions

Indispensable psychologists represent the best our profession has to offer. They combine excellence, relevance, and passion with motive power to create a vision of psychology in schools and the community that extends beyond commonly held perceptions. Their work is based on values and standards that exist harmoniously with personal beliefs. These are embodied in action, adding color to life and raising the standards and aspirations for us all. Indispensable psychologists are congruent within themselves and demonstrate this in all they do.

In this chapter, I have argued with passion for the case of the indispensable psychologist in American education. This psychologist is truly our hope for the future of a reconceptualized psychology in schools. The indispensable individual and the indispensable psychologist are one in the same—and I believe these leaders will take us into the 21st century with integrity and pride in our profession. May be all strive to be an "indispensable psychologist"—with the excellence, relevance, and passion—and the motive power—that they enjoy.

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